

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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84 MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SIGN MARKEY LETTER AGAINST NUCLEAR BUNKER BUSTER

Five-year Bush budget request totals almost \$500 million

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Co-Chair of the Bipartisan Taskforce on Nonproliferation and a Senior Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Select Committee on Homeland Security today released a letter to the House Armed Services committee co-signed by 83 Members of Congress, calling for the elimination of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), a.k.a. the nuclear bunker buster.

“The international credibility of the U.S. is already in tatters,” said Rep. Markey, “especially after the atrocities at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Now the Bush Administration wants to continue pursuing new kinds of nuclear weapons like the nuclear bunker buster, while simultaneously telling other countries not to. That’s like preaching temperance from a barstool – who in the world will take us seriously when we talk about nonproliferation while researching new nukes?”

The Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP) is part of the Bush Administration’s Advanced Concepts Initiative to research new, more “usable” nuclear weapons. This year, for the first time, the Administration’s nuclear weapons budget request includes five-year projections, which total almost \$500 million over the next five years for RNEP. RNEP was presented by Secretary Rumsfeld and others to Congress as a “study”, which was to cost only \$45 million and last only three years. Rep. Markey was the author of the May 9, 2002 amendment that first tried to cut funding for the RNEP program, which the House defeated by a vote of 172 to 243, and the cosponsor of the May 21, 2003 Tauscher-Markey RNEP amendment that the House defeated by a vote of 199 to 226. Should the Armed Services Committee fail to cut funding for the RNEP program, Rep. Markey intends to join again with Rep. Tauscher and other RNEP opponents to cut funding for the program when the House takes up consideration of the Defense Authorization bill.

RNEP is sometimes presented as a “mini-nuke”, whose radioactive fallout would be contained by an underground detonation. In fact, destroying a bunker buried deeper than 100 meters would require yields over 100 kilotons, five to ten times the size of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and certainly not a “mini-nuke”. Additionally, even a true 1-kiloton “mini-nuke” would have to be detonated 90 meters underground to contain its fallout, while the RNEP could probably penetrate no deeper than 20 meters.

Physicists studying the RNEP concept believe that if used, it would simply generate “a massive crater of radioactive dirt” that would rain down on an enormous area.

The U.S. also already has both nuclear and conventional bunker-busting capabilities. The B61-11 nuclear bunker buster has been in the U.S. stockpile since 1997, and the GBU-28 conventional bunker buster has been in the U.S. arsenal since the first Gulf War.

Rep. Markey concluded, “The RNEP is a wasteful, dangerous, and irresponsible use of taxpayer money and should be eliminated. This letter, cosigned by 83 of my colleagues, encourages the House Armed Services Committee to choose nuclear sanity and eliminate the nuclear bunker buster. If the Committee fails to act, we stand ready to take this debate to the House floor, where every year the margin has been getting closer and closer. 2004 may well be the year when we finally prevail.”

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey’s website,
<http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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